

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 699

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

S E C R E T MANILA 1114

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, MARR, MOPS, RP, CH

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE POSITION WITH RESPECT TO SPRATLEY ISLANDS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

REF: A. STATE 17663 B. MANILA 1038 C. MANILA 859 D. MANILA 858

E. TAIPEI 508

1. DURING COURSE OF SECRETARY INGERSOLL'S CALLS UPON PRESIDENT MARCOS AND FONSEC ROMULO DECEMBER 30, ISSUE OF SPRATLEY ISLANDS WAS RAISED AT FILIPINO INITIATIVE. ROMULO OPENED SUBJECT BY STATING HIS GOVERNMENT'S DISAPPOINTMENT THAT UN SECURITY COUNCIL HAD FAILED TO TAKE ACTION ON PARACELS RESPONSIVE TO GVN REQUEST. HE ALSO INDICATED UNHAPPINESS WITH U.S. POSITION REGARDING GVN APPROACH TO SEATO COUNCIL. SECRETARY INGERSOLL AND I EXPLAINED U.S. POSTURE IN BOTH THESE COUNCILS AND ROMULO LET MATTER DROP AT THAT POINT (HE SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD ME AT LUNCHEON THAT, DESPITE PHIL ATTITUDE, THEY WOULD NOT OPPOSE U.S. POSITION IN SEATO COUNCIL BUT WOULD PROBABLY ABSTAIN IF THE SUBJECT IS PUT TO A VOTE).

2. JUST PRIOR TO OUR MEETING WITH ROMULO, HE SENT
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ME STILL ANOTHER AIDE MEMOIRE ON THE SUBJECT OF THOSE ISLANDS IN AND NEAR THE SPRATLEY GROUP OCCUPIED BY FILIPINO FORCES. TEXT OF THIS AIDE MEMOIRE IS BEING SENT SEPTEL. ITS ARGUMENT IS BASED ON CONTENTION THAT THE ISLANDS

ON WHICH PHIL MILITARY UNITS HAVE BEEN STATIONED ARE NEW CORAL AND VOLCANIC OUTCROPPINGS WHICH WERE NOT HISTORICALLY PART OF THE SPRATLEY GROUP AND THEREFORE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED RES NULLIUS. WE SAID WE WOULD LIKE TO EXAMINE THE FACTS HISTORICALLY AND CARTOGRAPHICALLY BEFORE BEING ABLE TO COMMENT ON THIS PROPOSITION.

3. IN SUBSEQUENT CALL ON MARCOS, PRESIDENT PRODUCED LARGE MAP SHOWING DISPOSITION OF PHIL MILITARY FORCES ON THE ISLANDS IN QUESTION AND RAISED ONCE AGAIN THE "TURSTEESHIP" ISSUE WHICH HAD BEEN DISCUSSED IN REF D. I DREW UPON DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS IN REF A TO INDICATE THAT U.S. DID NOT RPT NOT SHARE PHIL INTERPRETATION ON THIS POINT. MARCOS DID NOT PURSUE THAT ARGUMENT IN DETAIL.

4. HE DID, HOWEVER, SURPRISE US BY TELLING US THAT HE WAS ARRANGING TO WITHDRAW ALL PHIL MILITARY FORCES FROM THESE ISLANDS AND TO REPLACE THEM BY A HANDFUL OF CIVILIANS WHO WOULD MAN WEATHER MONITORING STATIONS IN THE SAME LOCATIONS. SECDEF ENRILE SUBSEQUENTLY INFORMED ME THAT THIS ACTION WOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED "WITHIN THE NEXT FEW DAYS" AND THAT THE CIVILIANS WOULD BE TECHNICIANS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE WHO WOULD REMAIN ON THE ISLANDS AND AT OOLS FOR THE PURPOSE OF SHOWING THE FILIPINO FLAG THERE.

5. THROUGHOUT THE DISCUSSION WITH MARCOS AND SUBSEQUENTLY WITH ENRILE, BOTH EVIDENCED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF A PRC ATTACK AGAINST THE ISLAND OF ITU ABA WHICH IS OCCUPIED BY GRC FORCES (REF E). SINCE THIS ISLAND IS RELATIVELY CLOSE TO PALAWAN, THE PHILS FEAR THAT SUCH A CLASH WOULD NOT ONLY CAUSE CONSIDERABLE CONCERN TO THE FILIPINO PUBLIC BUT WOULD ALSO INTRODUCE THE PROSPECT OF A PRC PRESENCE NEAR THE PALAWAN TERRITORIAL SHELF WHERE INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES ARE CURRENTLY DRILLING IN PETROLEUM EXPLORATION.

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6. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT AT NO TIME THROUGHOUT THESE DISCUSSIONS DID FILIPINOS EVER RAISE THE ISSUE OF THE U.S.-PHIL MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A CONSISTENTLY UNSTATED IMPLICATION THAT U.S. SHOULD HAVE SOME MILITARY CONCERN ABOUT PRC ADVANCE INTO SHIPPING CHANNELS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, THIS WAS NEVER EXPLICITLY STATED IN THE CONTEXT OF U.S. DEFENSE RESPONSIBILITIES. WE NATURALLY REFRAINED FROM INTRODUCING THE SUBJECT IN THAT FRAMEWORK.

7. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, A SPECIFIC STATEMENT BY MARCOS THAT THE "INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY" AND "THE ALLIED POWERS WHO MADE THE PEACE TREATY WITH JAPAN" SHOULD

ASSUME SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ULTIMATE INTERNATIONAL DISPOSITION OF THESE VARIOUS ISLANDS AMONG THE CONTENDING CLAIMANTS. OUR ONLY COMMENT ON THIS MATTER WAS TO REVIEW THE ACTION TAKEN IN THE SAN FRANCISCO TREATY OF PEACE WITH JAPAN AND TO POINT OUT THAT TREATY HAD LEFT THE RESOLUTION OF THESE CLAIMS UNRESOLVED. WE WENT ON TO STATE THAT THE U.S. TOOK NO POSITION WITH RESPECT TO THE VALIDITY OF THE VARIOUS CLAIMS.

SULLIVAN

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